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SUBJECT: Serbs Defend Kosovo Status Proposal to EUR/SCE Director
Hoh

Summary

1. (SBU) Government of Serbia officials told visiting Director for South Central Europe (EUR/SCE) Chris Hoh on October 16 that Serbia's proposal for Kosovo autonomy was extensive and fair, and that the dynamics of the Kosovo status discussions were not. The government officials outlined their vision for Serbia's future within the European Union; some of which included NATO, some explicitly did not. In separate meetings with the Prime Minister's Political Advisor, Energy Minister, and MFA Political Director, Hoh advised Belgrade to stop using foreign policy in its domestic political campaign, tone down its anti-NATO rhetoric and to adopt a strategic, long-term view towards Euro-Atlantic integration. End Summary.

Kosovo: Serbia Needs "Membrane of Sovereignty"

2. (SBU) Serbian Government officials told EUR/SCE OD Hoh that the GOS was unified behind its Kosovo policy and that Serbia's autonomy offer to Pristina was "the most generous minority policy in the world." Foreign Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister, Vladeta Jankovic, a former vice president of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), told Hoh that the DSS agreed at its October 14 party congress that Kosovo could never become independent without a UNSC resolution or Serbia's recognition -- and Serbia would never recognize an independent Kosovo. Jankovic told Hoh that Belgrade's proposal for Kosovo autonomy was fair to Kosovo-Albanians. "No other national minority in the world would have as much as we are offering the Albanians," Jankovic said. The proposal preserved for Serbia, however, a "membrane of sovereignty." Elaborating, Jankovic said that, with this "membrane," Kosovo could have almost all but a seat in the UN and an army. Belgrade had no illusions that it could run Kosovo. But, he went on, it was a political imperative that the government ensured its ability to help Kosovo Serbs economically, educationally, and culturally.

3. (SBU) Interlocutors agreed on the need to deny Kosovo the UN seat and army, differing on few points. Energy Minister Popovic said the GOS needed to maintain control of borders, defense, customs and monetary policy, and to have Kosovo administered "under one UN presence." Belgrade should also oversee basic human and minority rights, in line with its obligations to the Council of Europe, Popovic said. Although Belgrade wanted "one voice in international organizations," Popovic said Belgrade could consider a possible exception with regard to the IMF and World Bank. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Political Director Stefanovic emphasized the need to respect the current borders, and to develop a "common sovereign roof" for both Kosovo and Serbia. The reality, he said, was that Serbia wanted to regain (vice retain) Kosovo.

Need for More Talks and More Engagement by Pristina

4. (SBU) GOS leaders told Hoh they expected more talks after

December 10, but argued that recent U.S. statements and Pristina's position were counterproductive. Jankovic said the Troika's December 10 deadline was hindering progress and U.S. public statements on the talks were undermining the negotiations. The Albanians, he said, were a stone wall in the process; though he hoped by January and February there would be "a new phase" in the talks. Stefanovic said talks were not going well and that new ideas needed to come from the Troika. He said the United States needed to make the Kosovo-Albanians participate more in the talks, which he described as "kabuki." Popovic said that Serbia's position was clear and engaged, but that messages needed to encourage both sides to negotiate. Hoh responded that it was the responsibility of the parties to persuade each other that an agreement was possible; otherwise the Ahtisaari Plan could serve as a basis to move forward. He emphasized that the costs of delay significantly increased over time. Hoh told Jankovic that additional time would only further the hardening of the two sides' positions, therefore would be counterproductive.

NATO: Diverging Views

15. (SBU) DSS officials told Hoh that Serbia's relationship with NATO should be limited to Partnership for Peace (PfP), but all acknowledged that Serbia's future decision to join NATO would ultimately be put to a referendum. Popovic said that the DSS's new platform, adopted on October 14, rejected Serbia's membership in NATO. "PfP is enough," he said, adding it was Serbia's "democratic right to be against NATO," and to remain neutral. Jankovic said although the DSS favored neutrality, it also wanted regional cooperation and good defense and economic relations with the United States, the EU and Russia. PfP "implies equal status with NATO, while membership would have additional costs and requirements," Jankovic said. Jankovic said ultimately NATO membership would come to a referendum, in which there would be an open and fair public debate. In contrast to the DSS platform of Prime Minister

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Kostunica, Stefanovic said President Tadic's team was doing all it could to be ready for NATO and a referendum on the issue. "We will prepare ourselves in a quiet atmosphere. While others are talking, we are doing," he told Hoh.

16. (SBU) Hoh noted Belgrade's recent anti-NATO rhetoric and urged restraint. Stefanovic said that any rhetoric was due to the Kosovo issue but should not poison the future relationship. Jankovic acknowledged that the anti-NATO rhetoric may be too strong, but assured that the rhetoric was only limited to individuals and not to the actual party position.

Serbia United on EU policy

17. (SBU) Serbian officials told Hoh that the coalition government was united on its pro-European stance, however, DSS interlocutors added a caveat if the EU were to recognize Kosovo. Stefanovic said that the EU is "the root" of the GOS and that Serbia would not step back from that goal. Jankovic also stressed that the EU was a priority for the GOS, but said if the EU were to recognize and independent Kosovo "we would have to reconsider relations." Popovic said Serbia's future relationship with the EU "remains up to the EU," adding how the EU and the United States responded towards Serbia with regard to Kosovo would determine the future relationship. "We will do our best, but much depends on how the West deals with us," Popovic said.

Comment

18. (SBU) Political leaders in Belgrade know that Kosovo's independence is looming. Domestic politics prevent them from saying this publicly and USG arguments to "convince them" fall on deaf ears. The comments to us by those closest to the decision makers suggest, however, that the GOS is preparing now for an outcome on Kosovo's independence. That preparation includes how the GOS will act domestically as well as how it intends to respond to the

Euro-Atlantic community. End Comment.

[19](#). (U) EUR/SCE Director Hoh has not cleared this message.

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